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ABSTRACT

There are several potential problems which the Speech Communication instructor may face in evaluating students' performance, including: (1) students may neglect to recognize the multi-cultural classroom context (including ethnic and religious differences); (2) different world-views can result in clashes of opinions; (3) morality can be perceived differently by representatives of two or more cultures; (4) students may perceive the instructor as "biased" for various reasons; (5) students may alter their ideas purposely to meet the instructor's expectations; and (6) the instructor's post-speech or post-debate critique may be misunderstood as criticism of certain ideas. Given the subjective and multifaceted nature of ethical codes, evaluatory practices are most objective when based on standards recognized and employed by both instructor and students. Standards of ethics are numerous, and must be taught (perhaps selectively) in order for the instructor to establish a common basis shared and understood by the class. At the basic level of evaluation are the standards of listening with an open mind, paying attention to dissenting opinions, promoting cross-cultural exchanges, and tolerance of expression. At the second level are suggested standards of evaluation including: the ethics of means and ends; the ethic based on intent toward the audience; warranted claims; and contextual ethics. (Fifteen references are appended.) (MS)

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THE ETHICS OF RHETORIC AND THE ETHICS IN RHETORIC: PROBLEMS IN EVALUATION

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The basic variables surrounding ethics in human communication are the communicator, the audience, the intentions, and the means of communicating. The receiver's judgment of a communication act is made by accounting the interrelated criteria of the communicator's intent, the nature of the means employed, and accompanying circumstances as they combine to enhance or undermine human rationality and choice making ability.

Among the important individuals involved in the development of communication skills in the classroom instructor. The instructor of communication performance skills spends much time in evaluating students' oral discourse. Both the student speaker and the instructor, evaluating a speech or a debate, bring to the communication context his or her own standards, judgments, perceptions, biases, stereotypes, and even prejudices. Different world-views and cross cultural aspects can add to the confusion surrounding the evaluation of oral skills. Codes of ethics seem far from being universal, as it seems rather difficult to transcend cultural barriers. Cultural conditions, at a time when international students and faculty join American education in significant numbers, has increased our awareness of differences in values, beliefs, and practices.

Before discussing the various standards of evaluation, it is important to understand the potential problems facing the Speech Communication instructor in evaluating students' performance: Students may neglect to recognize the multi-cultural classroom context (including ethnic and religious differences); Different world-views can result in clashes of opinions; morality can be perceived differently by representatives of two or more cultures;

students can perceive the instructor as "biased" for various reason; students may alter their ideas to purposefully meet the instructor's expectations; the instructor's post-speech or post-debate critique may be misunderstood as criticism of certain ideas.

This writer's contention is that given the subjective and multifaceted nature of ethical codes, evaluatory practices are most objective when based on standards recognized and employed by both instructor and students. Standards of ethics are numerous, and must be taught (perhaps selectively) in order for the instructor to establish a common basis shared and understood by the class. The standards, or codes of ethics, are for the most part, well established in the communication discipline. Their application, however, is in the general area of discourse critique (usually taught in upper level courses). The proposed objective here is the introduction of several standards for evaluating students' performances. The objective is to ensure a classroom atmosphere whereby students will learn the objective guidelines of evaluation the instructor follows. The specific purpose here is to propose several alternatives resulting from problems in evaluating students' oral skills. Each standard to be discussed here has unique features; It is the instructor's prerogative to select the best suited standard for the given rhetorical practice granted students are made aware of the chosen mode of evaluation.

Among the problems facing individuals in their communication behavior is a conflict between the self and the community. No matter the gaps in views and opinions between the individual and the community, various degrees of self-centerdness, deception, pretense, display, appearance, and manipulation

are always present. The awareness of these human characteristics will assist both instructor and students in understanding the practical necessity to reach at an evaluatory "contract" for classroom oral communication (Johannesen, 1983; p.52).

This paper will present two levels of discussion. The first one attempts to establish basic standards expected of instructors and students. The second level proposes guidelines of evaluation. At the basic level of evaluation are the standards of listening with an open mind, paying attention to dissenting opinions, promoting cross-cultural exchanges and tolerance of expression, to name a few. At the second level are suggested standards of evaluation which will include the following: The ethics of means and ends; the ethic based on intent toward the audience; warranted claims; and, situational ethic. These two lists are by no means complete but present rather short illustrations.

* * *

In a larger sense, ethics is the key term used to create a common understanding of how a community arrives at certain truths. Once epistemology becomes an ethic to the extent that the knower is related to the known, and the mode of knowing becomes a truth. Ethics are moral principles that separate right from wrong (Murphy, 1958; p.126). Quintilian stated that "Ethos, in all its forms, requires the speaker to be a good man of good character and courtesy" (Hillbruner, 1975; pp.245-46). Another definition states that "Ethics are the standards of moral conduct that determine our behavior." (Verderber, 1984; p.344). The ethics of rhetoric are those codes and standards that can ensure discourse to be good, justified, and honorable.

The ethics in rhetoric refers to the standards of evaluating discourse including the discourse that is good, justified, and honorable. The teaching of ethical speech amounts to the creation of a space in which the "community of truth" is practiced (Palmer, 1988).

The basic problem in bringing about a code of ethics lies in the two prominent views of rhetoric: The first view claims that rhetoric as a practice is an immoral art and thus not amenable to ethical discipline. The second view considers rhetoric to be moral; it has no inherent ethical discipline of its own but only techniques (Murphy, pp.126-128). Here lies the basic conflict in evaluating discourse. If the instructor weighs the expressed idea, it will be done in a partisan way. If the instructor states what is not ethical, he or she becomes an indoctrinator and ceases to be an instructor in rhetoric (Murphy, p.129).

Ethics, then, include both how we behave and how others behave. However, how others act is the perception we have, consequently, we judge others by the same standards we judge ourselves. Thus, the ethical codes by which we evaluate our students should be used to guide our evaluations of students' oral communication skills.

Though the conflict between the Platonic and Aristotelian views of rhetoric cannot realistically be solved in the classroom, the discussion thereof will, no doubt, bring students closer to comprehending the complex nature of ethical communication. The teaching of classroom ethics means a systematic thinking and theorizing with respect to questions about good, right, and wrong, and moral obligation (Nielsen, 1966; p.10). The rhetorician should be a

teacher of "successful" speaking where one seeks not immediate effects, but the projection of values and integrity. The instructor's task is to present a practical system that will put the practice of rhetoric in an ethical framework easily understood and implemented in the classroom.

In ethical evaluation of rhetorical communication the instructor should focus not only on the act of communication but more importantly on the communicator; the rational being that communication techniques are not the entire focus but rather the communicator's intent. The hope here is to view rhetoric as a self regulating art. The communicator who resorts to half truths, distortions, and misrepresentations may succeed with the audience but in the long run such a practice will be exposed.

Most of the problems in evaluating rhetorical communication arise when the topics are judgmental and value oriented. To illustrate; the speech topic may discuss a certain religious belief, or a fixed political orientation. Such topics may result in evaluation difficulties when the instructor has a legitimate criticism but is concerned the evaluation may be misunderstood as an attack on a given opinion. Consequently, instructor and student may be positioned in a conflict situation. Since this writer assumes most speech instructors have experienced conflict situation resulting from disagreement on an evaluation, it will suffice to assume that after such an incident two options are available: The first was to contemplate not allowing certain topics to be selected for speech or debate purposes (topics generally known to result in conflict situations). The second option was to continue engaging in evaluating classroom performances regardless of the given topic chosen for delivery.

Perhaps the quickest way to kill a speech program is to make it value free. The avoidance of controversial speech topics deprives the practice of speech making of two crucial lessons; the first, that of teaching freedom of expression, and the second, that of teaching responsible speech. The distinction between ethics and morality will strengthen the point. While ethics is the study and teaching of right and the good, morality is the practice of what we believe to be right and good. It is thus unlikely, especially in a democracy, that one can develop ethical responsibility without considering personal and social values (McCaleb & Dean, 1987; pp. 412-415).

If the instructor's neutrality is an inappropriate stance, a value oriented classroom environment includes some risks. The easy question to ask is, whose "facts" and whose perspectives will control classroom discussion? (Sproule, 1987; p.317). Another possible question is whether the ethics involved in a value oriented classroom discussion is an issue of "tolerance" or an issue of "responsibility"? Given the fact that the instructor enjoys influence and authority over opinions and interpretations, it is doubly important to promote an environment where one does not engage in converting the absolutist student to relativism, but to teach students to adapt their arguments (Duffy, 1987; p.404). Students, claim Duffy, must ultimately see that they can make examined choices among many alternatives (p.407). Wayne Booth suggests students must discover "grounds of confidence in a multiplicity of ways of knowing" (quoted in Duffy, pp.407-408).

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Before suggesting optional standards of evaluations, it is important the

instructor establishes an ethical framework for the communicative practices. At the basis of any ethical framework are the needs for both instructor and students to engage in active listening that permits dissenting opinions. Karl Wallace suggests keeping four "habits" in mind when engaging in rhetorical communication. These "habits" can be quite helpful to the instructor as well: the principle of searching (granting the complex nature of issues); the principle of justice (ensuring objectivity); preferring public to private motivation; and, respect for dissent, as best ideas surface out of debate and conversation (Wallace, 1955; pp.1-9).

Walton's philosophical model assumes the following: human capability for rational judgment, human capacity for exercising free options among defined alternatives, and human motivation to serve primarily selfish interests or interests of others (Johannesen, p.31). With these three assumption the instructor can point at the general expectations from the classroom speaker highlighting the use of good reasoning, choice making, and the motivation directing a given speech. This general framework will enable the instructor to justify a given code of ethic for evaluating the student's oral discourse.

As alluded to earlier, the contemporary classroom is representative of a multi-cultural mix with a growing number of both international students and faculty. The instructor may want to pay specific attention to the ethics for intercultural communication. The linear logic, empirical observations, and objective truths may be foreign to other cultures, religions, or political systems (Johannesen, p. 137). Though it will be presumptuous to assume the speech communication instructor can develop a code of ethic that will address the

characteristics of other cultures, it is essential for the instructor not to take for granted a given cultural mind-set in accepting an evaluatory practice. Though it is not suggested to develop an ethic designed for intercultural communication, one needs to be aware that a given code of ethic may be misunderstood by some students. The practical approach is to investigate through conversation the modes of thinking the students bring to the classroom. The framework for addressing the ethicality of a cross cultural classroom is to "show respect for values, morals, and normative practices of the other culture" (Howell quoted in Johannesen, p. 137). It is the opinion of this writer that, pedagogically, the instructor ought not to shy away from evaluation of oral communication of students representing other cultures. The avoidance of evaluation does not enhance cross cultural understanding. Further, it undermines the system of evaluation, ethics, audience feedback, and audience analysis.

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The second level of potential codes of ethic follows the model developed by Chesebro (1969). With a Burkeian frame of thought, Chesebro divides ethical standards into five alternative groups. First, ethical standards in communication should be patterned after the political structure of a society. Here, ethical communication would be consistent with the intended ideals and tenets of a democratic society. Second, ethical standards should reflect a more universal and humanistic perspective. The idea here is to emphasize principles such as the communicator intent toward the audience. Third, ethic in communication should concentrate upon means used to attain an end.

Forth, ethical communication ought to focus upon standards which enhance communication itself (such as ideals of freedom and equality). Fifth, the avoidance of establishing any set of standards, preferring instead the situation or the context to determine ethical codes.

The standards of ethical communication are numerous; most of them are quite well known and often discussed in various communication courses. The purpose here is to highlight several codes of ethics to be presented and used by the instructor in evaluating rhetorical communication. The instructor is well advised to present the ethical standard used before a given assignment (speech, argument), and even incorporate the selected standard in the evaluation form given to the student following the oral presentation.

The ethics of means and ends is simplistic on the surface, as there seems to exists a clear distinction between process and objectives. The ideal ethical code is to select good means to achieve good ends. However, questions immediately arise whether honorable ends justify questionable means. Another question is whether one person's means may be another's ends, and if such a transformation is possible, is it ethical? Clearly, most of us reject the notion that the end justifies the means (McCroskey, 1972; pp.266-268). The instructor needs to be aware of the possibility that the means-centered ethic can potentially be perceived or interpreted as ends-centered ethic. The ethics of means and ends is quite clearly not the most desirable one to use.

The ethic based on intent toward audience is perhaps easier to use as it does not pose the problem of different interpretations among communicators.

Ethics here is a matter of conscious choice making. The instructor has a rather clear objective but a difficult task here--to determine whether the student structured the speech with good intentions toward the respective audience. Unlike the means and end code of ethics, the intent code does not consider the effect of the message the sole means of evaluating the ethical quality of a given communication act. The focus here is on the communicator and not on the communication act (McCroskey, 1972; pp.268-270).

Toulmin's warranted claims parallels Aristotle's assertion that every statement needs to have proof supporting it. Though Toulmin's model of argumentation is more elaborate, it may suffice to use the principle that claims must be warranted by supportive data (McCroskey, 1972; pp.84-100). A variation on Toulmin's model can serve as measure of correction in case claims have not been correctly warranted. Zimmerman's "warranted inferences" suggests that often reasoning is executed through intuition and examples informally used as evidence for claims (Zimmerman, 1988; 406-432). The instructor can indicated that evaluation will follow the code of warranted claims cautioning students not to fall into the trap of confusing concrete data with unsupported inferences and intuitions.

Richard Weaver's ranking of ideal types of reasoning can be an intriguing code of ethic to be used in the classroom. Weaver creates four major types of reasoning and ranks them in a hierarchical manner. Argument from rational definition (argument by principle) is considered the most ethical form of reasoning as it is based on a clear definition or a principle. Argument from similitude (usually based on generalization) implies making a connection

between two items which are similar but not identical. Argument from cause and effect implies making a clear causal relationship between two independent items. Argument from circumstances assumes a relationship exists between two items because of certain sign (or analogy). In this ranking, arguments from genus (definition or principle) and similitude are preferable to those from cause and effect and circumstances (Weaver quoted in Johannesen, 1978; p.127). When using this model, the instructor can point at the choice the students can make focusing on what makes one form of reasoning stronger than another. The instructor can also limit the evaluation of a given oral assignment to one or two forms of reasoning.

Contextual ethics is a two edge sword. The code of ethic here allows for choice, flexibility, critique of absolutes and universals, and context adaptation (Camden et. al. 1984; pp.309-325). Contextual ethics allows for projecting beliefs and values of different cultures, ethnic groups, and religious convictions. Perhaps, this code of ethic's major strength lies in its use in a multifaceted society. The potential drawback of such a standard lies in applying this code of ethic to justify any proposed idea or action on the basis of context (a problem highlighted earlier under means and ends code of ethic). The instructor using this code of ethic may want to indicate to the class some guidelines. For an example, the instructor can emphasize the role and function of the communicator vis-a-vis the audience; standards of reasonableness and appropriateness; degree of audience awareness of the communicator's techniques; degree of urgency for implementation of the communicator's proposal; audience goals and values; and, audience

standards for ethical communication (Johannesen, 1983: p.67). The key concept in using contextual situation as an evaluatory criterion is responsible audience analysis on the part of the students.

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This position paper attempted to highlight potential ethical problems facing the instructor in evaluating students oral presentations in the communication courses. The principal theme of this paper is for the instructor to consider the ethic of evaluation to be identical with the ethical standards required of the students in structuring their oral messages. Stated differently, what is required of the students is also required of the instructor.

The evaluatory practices speech communication instructors follow are usually limited to content, organization, style, and delivery. The ethic of oral presentation is often presented separately of the evaluation criteria. By specifically presenting and discussing the given or optional code of ethic to be followed in the classroom, both students and instructor will reach a common understanding of what is expected of each. The instructor, by following a shared ethical standard, can avoid potential conflicts and misunderstandings surrounding a given evaluation. This and more, with the presentation of various codes of ethics, the instructor will engage in teaching communication ethics in a practical and intriguing way.

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